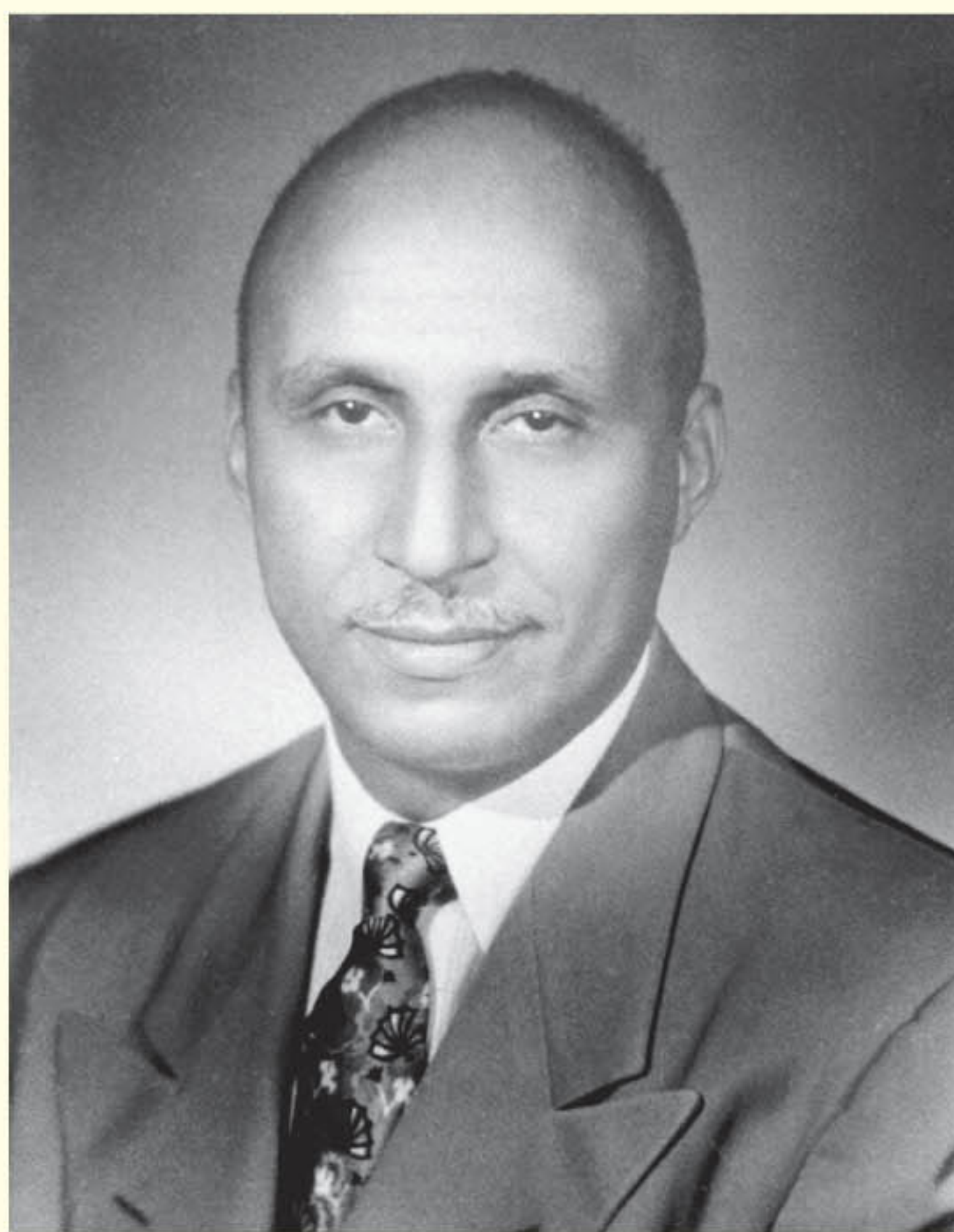


Oliver W. Hill Building Dedication

Virginia Capitol Square

October 28, 2005



Oliver White Hill came from very humble beginnings and no one could have foretold his actions would change the course of history. Born in 1907 in Richmond, Virginia, he attended Howard University receiving an undergraduate degree and a law degree. In 1933, Hill graduated second in his law school class behind his close friend and colleague Thurgood Marshall.

In 1939, Hill moved back to Richmond and began practicing law with the law firm of Hill, Tucker, and Marsh. At that time, Hill was also serving as a cooperating attorney for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) Legal Defense Fund (LDF) founded by his close friend Thurgood Marshall. During his legal career he worked to broaden the equalization standard of the 1896 case of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, which established the separate but equal doctrine that became the basis for segregation. Once quoted as saying "I went to law school so I could get out and fight segregation," Hill went on to campaign for equal rights for all Americans. He won his first civil rights case in 1940, *Alston vs. School Board of Norfolk, Va.*, requiring equal pay for all teachers regardless of race. In another lawsuit, he won the right for equal transportation for school children.

In 1951, 450 African American students attending Robert Moton High School in Prince Edward County, Virginia began a two-week protest. The issues they were protesting were poor conditions and overcrowding. They also believed their school environment deprived them of the educational opportunities afforded to their white counterparts. Hill with a team of lawyers led the litigation on behalf of 170 students against the Prince Edward County School Board. The case was *Davis vs. the County School Board of Prince Edward County* and it challenged the law requiring segregated schools. The court ruled in favor of the School Board of Prince Edward County believing there was no harm to either race. Later the Davis desegregation case became one of five cases to be included and decided in the historic 1954 landmark decision of *Brown vs. the Board of Education*.

Hill's civil rights battles were not limited to the courtroom. In 1948, Hill became the first African American elected to the Richmond City Council since Reconstruction. In 1969, Hill organized an observance to commemorate 19 Africans who landed at Jamestown 350 years earlier. Throughout his career, Hill was active in numerous committees and associations such as; the National Legal Committee of the NAACP, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, the National Bar Association, the National Association for Intergroup Relations Officials, and the Old Dominion Bar Association which he founded.

Over the years Oliver Hill's dedication and commitment to equality for all Americans has been recognized. In 1959 he was the recipient of the Lawyer of the Year Award from the National Bar Association, the Presidential Medal of Freedom Award presented by President Clinton in 1999, in 2000 he received the Harvard Medal of Freedom, and in 2005 he received the 90th Spingarn Medal from the NAACP.

While Hill is most noted for his involvement in the landmark case of *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, his overall contributions to broaden equal rights for citizens of the Commonwealth and the nation are undeniable.



Oliver W. Hill - circa 1960